

Sunday 3rd June 2018
2 Corinthians 4:5-12 **Mark 2:23-3:6**

Intro:

Who has picked blackberries as they have been on walk and enjoyed eating them as they walk along? Or maybe even picked fresh mushrooms on an autumn morning and gone home and enjoyed them for breakfast?

Who has driven along the motorway or some similar major road late on an autumn evening and seen on the hillside the farmers, with the spotlights on the front of their tractors bringing in the harvest so as to avoid the rains?

There is a world of difference between the 2 and in our reading from Mark's gospel this morning, I feel that the disciples plucking heads of grain is more like the former, more like us picking a few blackberries or a few mushrooms and enjoying their goodness

Sabbath:

But, the sabbath was of very significant value and strictly adhered to by the Jewish people. It was the 4th commandment that Moses had received up the mountain and etched onto the stone tablets 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.'

Why? Well if you read Ex 20:8-12 it gives a bit more detail but in essence what it is saying is that we should work/labour and do all our work in 6 days and on the 7th we should rest and worship God, a day to recharge our physical and our spiritual batteries, to put God back in the centre of our lives and trust His provision for us.

The LORD blessed the Sabbath day and HE made it holy!

In our reading the Pharisees challenged Jesus because Jesus' disciples were plucking heads of grain as they walked through the cornfields and then, a few verses later the Pharisees were deliberately watching Jesus to see if he would cure a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath

Black Cab drivers in London:

Did you know that until recently London cab drivers were required by law to carry a bale of hay (Queen Victoria and horse drawn cabs)

Still today they are required to check dogs for signs of rabies before it can travel in the cab (Rabies was eliminated from Britain in 1902) and ask passengers if they are afflicted by smallpox or the plague (both eradicated from Britain years ago)

Pharisees were intently watching Jesus trying to catch him out

The disciples and Jesus were not observing the law as the Pharisees had come to understand it! But the Sabbath was never meant to be about working hard keeping such specific details in order to persuade God to bless us

It was about downing tools and taking time to rest in Him and His blessings that are already available to us

The Sabbath and other commandments are about setting us free from burdens rather than burdening people with more things to do and not to do

Jesus was deliberately challenging and changing the status quo, I think He was purposely generating conflict

Mark 3:3 Jesus calls forward a man with a withered hand - one of the few times that Jesus initiated the healing of someone

He was making a point to the Pharisees that love and compassion for people were far more important than the minutiae details of keeping the law - much of which had been created by them and not God anyway.

Jesus was offering a new vision for life and a new vision of God, a new way of understanding God, not confined to their old ways and detailed law keeping, but a freeing and blessed relationship with Him.

Just before this passage Jesus had been accused of eating with a sinner (Levi the tax collector) and he had responded with talking about new wine into old wineskins.

Challenging their ways of thinking and reconfiguring their understanding of God, both as individuals and as a community was threatening to the Pharisees and others.

As it can be to us today too

The challenge to their way of being was so strong that the Pharisees conspired with the Herodians to destroy Jesus - kill Him

The 6th commandment is Thou shall not kill !!

Jesus was angry and grieved / deeply distressed at their hard hearts (sermon a few weeks back)

How had it come to this? That the people who were leaders of the faith had become so threatened and hard of heart that they were willing to have someone killed?

Their adherence to scripture and tradition had made them blind to the compassion and joy that was poured out by Jesus to everyone

They had become religious rather than gospel focussed

The message of Jesus was good news. Freedom. Love. Joy

Not restricting rules and regulations. Not fear and hatred.

But rites and rituals and traditions are a familiar and therefore often safe place.

It often seems better to keep God tame and in a box because we know how to live with that, we know the expected responses

But Jesus came to break the box open, to challenge the way things were, to bring life and life in all its fullness

What is Jesus doing today that challenges us enough to make us feel uncomfortable?

Do we try and box Him in?

Would we rather 'kill Jesus' than be transformed by His love?

Many ways to kill a plant.....

Are we 'killing Jesus' ?

PRAY